

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN

HOMILETIC MAGAZINE.

VOL. IX.

MARCH, 1911.

No. 3.

Sermon on the Epistle-Lesson for the First Sunday in Lent.

2 COR. 6, 1—10.

"The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men," St. Paul writes in his letter to Titus. This refers to the birth of Christ, as we learned on Christmas-day. We needed such a grace of God which provided our salvation, for we are sinners, and as such subject to God's wrath and eternal punishment. Hence we must be saved from our sins and the punishment they incurred. This salvation from our sins appeared in Christ. He came into this world to be our Savior, to redeem us from sin, death, and hell, and His whole life, from His lowly birth to His ignominious death, served this one purpose of our redemption and salvation. He has accomplished His aim: He completed the work of redemption, He brought us salvation, and therefore there is no longer any condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. Thus, therefore, in Christ the grace of God hath appeared that has indeed brought us salvation. This grace of God is now offered to sinful mankind in the word of the Gospel, both as it is written in the Holy Scriptures and as it is preached by the ministers of Christ. In the Gospel the Savior still calls to every one: Matt. 11, 28. And His servants, the ministers of the Gospel, still proclaim to sinful and lost mankind in the words of the holy Apostle Paul: 2 Cor. 5, 20. Yes, in the Gospel the invitation is extended to all: Come, ye sinners, receive and accept the grace of God in Christ!

Oh, that all would heed the gracious call and accept the glorious invitation! Oh, that all would receive the grace of God which is offered to them! But alas! there are thousands, millions, living in Christian countries, where the Gospel is preached in every city and county, who despise its gracious offer, who disdain to accept the eternal salvation it brings, who prefer to remain in their sins and to run willfully into their own perdition, who ridicule religion or perhaps even oppose and antagonize it. There are also many who

listen to the Gospel invitation and seemingly receive it, who in their outward life pose as Christians, but whose heart is still far from God, who inwardly reject the grace which before men they profess to accept, who, in brief, are hypocrites.

And alas! it is a sad fact, that even among those who receive the grace of God, and receive it sincerely and truly, there are not a few who receive it in vain. There are so many, who, after receiving it, lose it again, who after conversion become backsliders, who neglect to fight the good fight of faith, and lose the faith again which God's power had wrought in their hearts. Yes, there are so many that endure not until the end and therefore are not saved, but lost, lost eternally, just as are those who had never received the grace of God, yea, whose damnation shall be even worse, because, having tasted the sweetness of grace and salvation, they neglected and lost it through their own fault.

This happened in the days of Paul, it has happened since, and still happens. Hence we have good reason to lay to heart his admonition in our text

NOT TO RECEIVE GOD'S GRACE IN VAIN.

This implies two things:

1. *That we receive God's grace in true faith when it is offered;*
2. *That we guard against losing it after having accepted it.*

1.

The first thing that is necessary if we are not to receive God's grace in vain is this, that we accept it in true faith when it is offered. God offers His grace by the Word of the Gospel. Those, then, who will not even listen to this Gospel, who remain altogether away from the visible assembly of the Christians, who openly despise and denounce religion, do not receive God's grace at all, do not permit Him to offer it to them. Paul's exhortation indirectly applies also to these people. For it implies that we must not reject God's grace when it is being offered us, but, rather, accept it. Before it has been received at all, it cannot be received in vain. Paul begins his admonition with the words: "We, then," etc., v. 1. He calls himself and the other apostles "workers together with God." Men often urge as a reason for not accepting the Gospel that it is preached to them by fellow-men and fellow-sinners. This objection Paul here meets. He means to say: Do not let that keep you from accepting the grace of God, because we who preach this grace to you offer it to you; we are God's fellow-workers. God has sent us to do this work for Him, and He works with us and through us.

In the following verse Paul explodes another excuse that is offered for not accepting the Gospel and the grace which it brings. "For He saith," etc., v. 2. These words are taken from the 49. chapter of Isaiah, where God speaks them to the Messiah. The Savior had to pass through many severe trials and sufferings; in these agonies

He cried to God, and God heard His prayer. He delivered Him finally from all His sufferings; He raised Him up to heaven and glorified Him. That was an acceptable time and a day of salvation to all sinners. And this salvation is now offered to us through the Gospel. Hence the acceptable time and the day of salvation for us is that time in which the Gospel is preached to us. That time is now. For now the Gospel offers us God's grace and salvation. Now, now is the accepted time, now is the day of grace. The Gospel day is the day of salvation; the means of grace, the means of salvation; the offer of the Gospel, the offer of salvation; and the present time is the proper time to accept these offers. To-day, while it is called to-day, we must accept it. The morrow is not at our disposal; we know not what will be on the morrow, nor where we shall be; and we should remember that present seasons of grace are but short and uncertain, and cannot be recalled when they are past. Here, then, Paul rebukes procrastination in receiving the Gospel. That is the trouble with so many people; they intend to receive the Gospel and the grace of God at some future time, but are not ready to do so now. Nay, says Paul, now, now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation. If you neglect to accept the Gospel now, it may be too late for you. It may be offered to you for the last time to-day. It may be that your time of grace will suddenly and unexpectedly come to an end before you can receive it. Oh, therefore, receive it now, lest it should have been offered to you in vain!

2.

The second and main portion of Paul's exhortation, not to receive God's grace in vain, is this, that we should guard against losing it after having once received it. To this point he devotes the greater portion of our lesson. In order to rightly understand the following words we must bear in mind that Paul sets himself and the other apostles up as an example which the Corinthian Christians, and we, too, should follow.

He says of himself and the other apostles: "Giving no offense," etc., v. 3. Against this the apostles had to guard at their time, and of this their successors in office, the ministers of the Gospel, must still beware, *viz.*, not to give offense to anybody, lest their ministry be blamed. A bishop or pastor, Paul says, must be blameless. If he does anything unbecoming, people are very apt to say: If the preacher can do such things, we certainly may do it too. And the wicked are sure to make a big ado about it, and become only more hardened in their unbelief. In this way, therefore, the ministry, the office of the ministry, is blamed for the sin of the individual, and the work of other pastors is hampered too. Hence preachers must especially be careful not to give offense to anybody.

But other Christians, if they would not receive the grace of God in vain, must follow the example of their pastors in this. They, too, must beware of giving offense to anybody. Christians must avoid

all evil and every appearance of evil. They must not be conformed to the world in its sinful pursuits. If they do so, they give offense both to their fellow-Christians and to the wicked. Their fellow-Christians will either be grieved by their conduct, or misled to follow them in their wrong way. And the wicked will be strengthened in their wickedness, and make the Christian religion responsible for their actions. And, above all, they will show by such conduct that they are no longer Christians, that true faith, which cannot exist without true holiness of life, is no longer in their hearts, that the grace of God, which they had once received in true faith, no longer belongs to them, in short, that they have received the grace of God in vain.

Furthermore Paul tells the Christians to follow his example, and that of the other apostles, in this, that they "approve themselves as the ministers of God." Apostles and preachers are in a special sense the ministers of God. They are sent by Him to serve Him in His vineyard by preaching the Gospel to all nations. Other Christians are not called for this work. Still they, too, are ministers or servants of God; they are to serve Him in their respective professions by fulfilling their duties to the glory of His name and contributing from their earthly means towards the support and spreading of His kingdom. And they should therefore be careful to approve themselves such ministers of God, if they would not receive the grace of God in vain.

The apostle then goes on to show in what manner this is to be done. He first tells them how they are to act in adversity: "In much patience . . . in tumults." He and other preachers of his time often met with these things. And other Christians are not exempt from them. We are all more or less subject to afflictions by Satan on account of our sins; we often get into necessities and distresses, that is, into poverty and misfortune, and perhaps also persecution, stripes, imprisonments, and tumults may come upon us. In all such states of adversity Christians must know how to act, in order to show themselves as ministers or servants of God. And what their conduct must be, with this end in view, he briefly says at the beginning by the words: "in much patience." Yes, in all adverse circumstances Christians must be patient. We, too, are always inclined to be impatient in troubles and sufferings. But we must fight against this propensity. For impatience is base ingratitude towards God. God's grace has rescued us out of the depth of sin's dreadful misery, out of everlasting woe: should we not be willing, then, to bear the trials that God sends us? Should we not be patient in every tribulation, knowing that it is sent by God and that it is meant for our good? Surely, if we do not fight against this spirit of impatience which dwells in our hearts, if we yield to it and permit it to dominate in us, then it will finally quench the flame of faith; for that cannot burn in such a damp atmosphere of ingratitude towards God, and there is great danger that we receive God's grace in vain.

Secondly, Christians must also approve themselves as the ministers of God in their daily life and conversation. This Paul inculcates in the following words: "In labors . . . by the word of truth." All this has reference to the calling or profession of Christians, or to their relations towards their fellow-beings. They should be diligent in their labors. That is also a Christian duty. For he who would not work neither should eat. They must be conscientious in their religious observances. Watchings and fastings are not commanded, but often they are good exercises to tame the wicked desires of the flesh, and probably for this reason they are here recommended. Pureness of life and religious knowledge are necessary qualifications of a Christian, in which he should daily seek to grow. And towards their fellow-beings Christians should exercise longsuffering in regard to their faults, kindness and unfeigned love in their own conduct towards others; and all this they must do by, or in accordance with, the Word of Truth and by the power of the Holy Ghost. The neglect of these things endangers the spiritual life of a Christian and makes him lose God's grace, and thus causes him to receive it in vain.

Finally, Paul shows how Christians should approve themselves as ministers of God in their fight with the world. He closes with the words: "By the power of God," etc., vv. 7—10. All these are seeming paradoxes or contradictions. But they all exist in harmonious union in the true Christians. With the world Christians are dishonored and in evil report, but with God they are honored and in good report. The world accounts them deceivers and their religion a fraud, but God knows their heart to be true and their faith to be unfeigned. They are unknown, they are not renowned among men, yet known to God. They are as dying, they are persecuted by the wicked and perhaps killed, and yet they live, for they have life everlasting; chastened and not killed. They are accounted as sorrowful by the world, they are looked upon as mopish people that have no pleasures and enjoyments, and yet they always rejoice in the Lord. They are as poor, etc.; they generally are not rich in the goods of this world, but they have a treasure up in heaven which moth, etc. And so they stand in need of the armor of righteousness on the right hand and the left, etc.

G. L.

Sermon on the Gospel-Lesson for the Fourth Sunday in Lent.

JOHN 6, 1—15.

Everybody naturally desires to be happy. Nobody wishes to be unhappy. Everybody shuns as much as possible the things that would make him unhappy. Nobody, if he is in his right mind, would, for instance, willfully cripple himself in any manner, because he knows it would tend to make him unhappy.

Now, the means that people employ in order to make themselves happy are of various kinds. The great majority strive to find their happiness in the things of this life. Some of them think it the height of fortune if they can lead an easy life, free from care and anxiety. Others are epicureans, caring only to revel daily in the sweets and luxuries of this life. Others, again, are satisfied if they can participate in all the enjoyments that come along, if they can attend theaters and dances, or other places of public amusement. Still others delight in fine, gaudy, stylish clothing. But by far the greatest number think it the consummation of all happiness when they can accumulate vast riches, when they can add one million to the other, and when they can rise above their fellowmen, climb up to the highest positions of honor.

All these are the things by which the children of the world strive to make themselves happy. But there is another class of people in this world that do not follow their fellowmen in this pursuit. The Christians do not look for their happiness in these things. They spurn this world with all its riches, and honors, and enjoyments, they look for a happiness beyond this life. Their desires are turned to the eternal, infinite bliss of heaven, and they would rather go without all the joys which this earth affords than lose the happiness that is awaiting them in the life to come.

Of course, the children of this world do not honor them for this. They call them fools and make them the butt of ridicule and contempt. And more than this: they look upon a Christian as a most unhappy and pitiable person. They think: What good does life do a Christian? Why, he spurns everything that makes life worth living, everything that makes it pleasant and agreeable. The places of enjoyment and pleasure he shuns and stays at home, reading his Bible, singing and praying, and torturing himself with thoughts about his sins, about God, death, judgment, and eternity. The way to honor also would be open to him, but he avoids it, and by his exaggerated piety he subjects himself to just contempt and ridicule. Such a Christian, they think, willfully renounces happiness, turns this beautiful earth into a vale of unhappiness, and makes himself miserable.

But is this really true, my dear hearers? Does a Christian, by forsaking the world with its pleasures and treasures, really make himself unhappy? I say, no; and every true Christian will concur with me. Even with regard to earthly things, even in that which pertains to this life, Christians are the happiest people living on this earth. This is what to-day's Gospel-lesson teaches us. Let me show you:

HOW HAPPY CHRISTIANS ARE ALSO IN EARTHLY THINGS.

1. *They are free from anxious cares for this life;*
2. *They are free from the torturing desire for the things of this life.*

1.

The narrative related in our Gospel-lesson is wonderful not only because of the wonderful miracle which it relates, *viz.*, that Christ with five loaves of bread and two small fishes fed five thousand men, not counting women and children, but it is a wonderful story also in this respect, that so many thousands followed Christ into a wild, desert place, without providing themselves with anything to eat, and stayed all day long to listen to Christ's preaching, without considering how they might be able to satisfy their hunger at break of night. What may have been the reason for this happy carelessness? They had not yet found out that Christ could spread a table for them in the wilderness, for this miraculous feeding of a multitude with a few loaves and fishes was the first of this kind that Christ performed. There is no other explanation to be found for it than this, that Christ's person and Word removed every care for their body and life.

Christ does so still. As soon as a person has found Christ, as soon as he has become a Christian, the care for the things of this life vanish as a fog before the rays of the sun. But as long as a man is a disbeliever, as long as he knows nothing of Christ or does not care to know anything of Him, he is unable to dismiss his anxious cares for this life.

Look at the children of this world, my friends! Their hearts are filled with constant cares and worry about the future. Not only he that is poor and really does not know where to procure to-morrow's bread for his family, nay, also he that has plenty is concerned about his future. With an anxious and restless heart he thinks: Well, just now I am all right. My business is fair and supplies me well. But what if I should become sick for some time? What will become of me when I am old and feeble, unable to support myself any longer? And if such times of distress come upon him, if business relaxes, if his health fails, if his property is damaged by fire, oh, what worry fills his heart, wringing deep sighs from his heart and robbing him of his sleep for many a night! Yes, my friends, even those who are rich and wealthy are constantly beset with cares. Having loaned out extensive sums of money, they are afraid, lest they might lose them through dishonest debtors or through severe reverses of fortune. If they own large buildings, they are haunted by the apprehension of their being destroyed by fire. If they have a prospering business, they fear that by failing in one of their speculations it might be ruined. Oh, if we could look into the hearts of the children of this world, even though they may seem the happiest beings on earth, we would find that care and worry fill their hearts, when they rise from their beds, when they pursue their business, when they lie down to sleep, yea, even when they go to their places of enjoyment.

What, then, is all the avowed happiness of the children of this world worth? It is nothing but a thinly sugar-coated pill that quickly melts in their mouth and leaves behind it a bitter taste.

What are all their pleasures and enjoyments? Nothing but beautiful dreams and delusions from which they only awake too quickly to renewed worry and care.

But when a man becomes a Christian, when he comes to Christ, oh, what a change takes place with him! He has now gained the firm confidence that all his sins are forgiven, that God is gracious to him for Christ's sake, that he is a child of God, and that God is his Father. This faith takes away all his former anxious care for this life. If he is poor, he thinks: Why should I worry? Am I not serving a rich Master? He will provide for me. He feeds the fowl of the air and clothes the lilies of the field; how much more will He take care of me! Though, with all his poverty, he has a numerous family, he nevertheless thinks: Not I, but God is the true Father and Protector of my children. He will provide for them. My duty is only to work for them and to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. If to his poverty sickness and other distress are added, he still thinks; Why should I worry? God has counted all the hairs of my head; without His will nothing can happen to me; from Him comes happiness and mishap: why, then, should I be unwilling to bear what He sends me? He has promised in His Word that He will not tempt me beyond my powers, so I will trust Him to take away my cross as soon as He deems it wise to do so. (Ps. 42, 11.)—Such are the thoughts of a Christian in distress. If, on the contrary, however, God has placed him into favorable circumstances, if He has blessed him with earthly riches, even then he will not permit anxious and useless care and worry to enter his heart. He looks upon his property not as though it were his own, but he knows that God has only loaned it to him to be steward over it and to apply it to a good use: to the honor of God, towards the benefit of his fellowmen, and for the best of his own person and family. Accordingly, he reasons: Why should I worry about my property? If God should be pleased to take away from me some or all of that which He has now confided to me, He only relieves me of a burden.

Behold, my friends, how happy the Christian is also in regard to this life! He is like a wanderer who, bearing a light burden, joyfully looks forward and hurries on toward his goal. The Word of God is his staff; God's grace, his sun by day and his star by night; God's Spirit, his guide; God's power, his protection; God's promises, his food and drink with which he daily strengthens and refreshes himself. Are you all such Christians, my friends? Oh, then you are happy! Then you can say with David: Ps. 23, 1.

2.

Now it is indeed true: Christ has not promised more than clothing and food to His children. Just as much as they need, and nothing more. Are not the children of the world happier, then, in this respect, as their god, the devil, has promised them all the riches

of the world, and allows them to employ any means to get hold of them? No. Christians are content with the necessary things; their heart is free from the desire for this world's treasures, whereas this is not the case with disbelievers.

The heart of man cannot find true happiness in this world. Man thinks the reason for this is, that something is still missing, that he has not yet acquired all that he needs to make himself happy. Consequently he is never content with what he has. If he is in good circumstances, he longs to be rich. If he is rich, he craves to be still richer. If he has his own business, but must rent a house to live in, he wants to possess his own house. If he has a house, he wants to own a palace. If he owns a palace, he would like to own more. If he has rented a farm, he would like to own one; if he owns a quarter section, he would like to own a whole. If he has risen to a station of honor, he would like to rise still higher. If he is governor, he would like to be president. Man's desire for the riches and honor and pleasures of this world can never be satisfied. The more a man possesses, the more he craves, just as he who drinks sea-water is constantly made more thirsty by it.

And what is the consequence of this desire? The consequence is, that the children of this world are never content and therefore never happy. They are chasing after happiness, but this happiness flees from them farther and farther. This desire makes the richest poor at heart, makes him who is honored by his fellowmen discontent, makes the votary of pleasure unhappy and miserable, in short, makes him who is outwardly the most happy man the most unhappy inwardly. Therefore Solomon says: Prov. 13, 7.

And who are they that make themselves rich though they have nothing? The Christians, my dear hearers, the Christians that have found Christ.

Look at the people in our text. Christ had only fed them with a few barley-loaves and fish. He had not tickled their palate with delicate fruits and luxuries. But how content and joyful do they sit down upon the grass and eat their frugal meal! When they were filled, they jubilantly exclaimed: "This is of a truth the prophet that should come into the world!" Their hearts are filled with joy.—Behold in these people the picture of true Christians. When Christ only feeds and clothes them scantily, they are satisfied. They have found the one thing needful; they have found Christ and His salvation; they are certain of God's grace and of heaven, and thus the desire for the wealth of this earth has been subdued in their hearts. Christ is all in all to them. He provides for their spiritual and for their bodily welfare. Though He does not give them too much in the latter respect, still He always gives them enough. And what is more, they are satisfied with what He gives them.

Are you such Christians? Are you content with what you have? How happy you are, if this is the case! Though you may be poor

in earthly riches, still you are rich in the Lord. But I fear this is not the case with all of you. We are all more or less inclined to be dissatisfied with our circumstances. Though we are Christians, still we all live in the world, and our flesh still clings to this world and its goods. And I must confess, the impression which I have gathered in many instances is this, that many of you would be happier if you were more content with your lot. Remember, the world is everywhere a vale of tears. Everywhere we must bear some cross or other. Therefore let me exhort you: Do not strive to find your happiness in this life, but look for it beyond the grave, then you will be satisfied with whatever God may give you here. Let me impress the words of Paul upon your minds and hearts: 1 Tim. 6, 6—10. God help us to become Christians more and more, and thus, at the same time, more content! Amen.

G. L.

Sermon Outlines for Lenten Season.

III.

JOHN 18, 19—27.

The band of men and officers led Jesus bound into the palace of the chief priest, where he was maltreated. (A brief resumé of the foregoing lesson is to be given here.) After his first denial Peter's eyes were not yet opened, but he again denied his Lord and Master Jesus Christ, while the latter was questioned with regard to His disciples and His doctrine, and struck because of His answer.

CHRIST IN THE PALACE OF THE HIGH PRIEST CAIAPHAS.

1. *He is questioned with respect to His disciples and doctrine.*
2. *He is smitten by an officer.*
3. *He is again denied by Peter.*

1.

Text: vv. 19—21. The trial of Jesus took place in the palace, according to all forms of the law, although it was an unjust trial. Jesus was examined before the chief council. It was the duty of the *συνέδριον* to watch over and examine all doctrine and worship.—The chief council also sent a delegation to John to inquire about His doctrine, John 1, 19—27. In the name of the chief council, as its chairman, so to say, the high priest asked Jesus with regard to His disciples and His doctrine, v. 19. He pretends to be just and to desire not to condemn Christ before hearing Him and giving Him a chance to defend Himself. The questions as to His followers and doctrine really are one question, since the apostles and other disciples followed Christ because of His doctrine. This is evident from the answer of Christ, vv. 20. 21. The true purpose of these questions on the part of the chief priest was to gain material for accusation.

What did he ask Jesus? Matt. 26, 61—64; Mark 14, 60—63; Luke 23, 3. — Christ answers, vv. 20. 21. He does not consider the chief priest worthy of an answer, because he was not seeking the truth to follow it. Cf. vv. 33—36. It was beneath Christ's dignity and majesty to answer the high priest's question, for he had already concluded to deliver Christ to be condemned to death under all circumstances. Christ had spoken openly to the world. He had taught in the synagogue, in the temple, and in public. Every one who wanted to could hear Him. He had said nothing in secret. Every one could hear and understand Him. — An example for all Christians. They should speak openly and freely of Christ. They have no reason to be ashamed of Christ and their faith. It is the duty of Christians to confess Christ, for: Matt. 10, 32; Luke 12, 8. 9. Contrast between the doctrine of Christ and the secret societies or lodges: Christ spoke openly; they speak in secret. — With the words of v. 21 Christ criticises the conduct of the chief priest. It is the duty of the accuser to prove his accusations. The accused is not to incriminate himself. — Christ wishes to be judged according to the testimony of His disciples and followers who had heard what He had said.

Application. — We are often asked with respect to our doctrine by such as seek the truth, as well as by those who are none but scoffers. As did Christ, so are we to make a bold and free confession of our faith before the world. It is our solemn duty to confess Christ everywhere by word and deed, and have nothing to do with the unfruitful works of darkness. We should confess the truth and judge whatsoever is wrong in word and deed, even if on account of this we are mocked, laughed to scorn, or even maltreated as was Christ.

2.

Text: vv. 22. 23. The officer smote Jesus because he considered the answer of Jesus immodest and indiscreet. Cf. Ex. 22, 28. It was consistent with truth and suited to the occasion. With God there is no respect of persons. To this smiting and the question of the officer, v. 22b, Jesus answered: v. 23. The servant, or officer, had no right to strike Christ, even if He had spoken indiscreetly, Deut. 25, 2. Therefore Christ rebukes him. No doubt Christ rebuked him earnestly, and yet His rebuke sprang from love toward, and sympathy with, him. — Behold the patience, friendliness, and longsuffering of the Lord! Christ could have destroyed this officer with one word. Christ an example of patience and meekness. Here is a proof of His words Matt. 11, 29. 30. Christ was maltreated. His disciples can expect nothing better. In their suffering they should learn patience from Christ. As Christ defended Himself, so Christians are to defend their Christian name and God's Word. Christians should defend Christ out of love towards Him and His kingdom.

Application.—Let us learn patience in trials and tribulations from Christ! We must be willing to be despised, mocked, yea, persecuted for Christ's sake. From Christ we should also learn to reprove the world of sin and wrong, even if we thereby provoke the enmity and hatred of the children of the world. Love prompts us to help deliver the world from destruction.

3.

Text: vv. 25—27. During the trial of Jesus, Peter stood at the dangerous coal-fire. His first denial should have caused him to shun the company of those servants. The reappearance of Christ in the court of the high priest's palace caused the servants to again rail at Peter. Pointing to Christ, very likely, they said, "Art not thou also one of His disciples?" Peter again denied, v. 26, and began to curse himself as the other Evangelists inform us. You know you are one of His followers; you cannot deny it; we saw you in the garden. They insist. It affords them pleasure to trouble Peter. Here Jews and Romans are combined. Otherwise enemies; here friends.—So it is to-day. Among themselves the children of the world are divided; against Christ they are united.—When this servant, a kinsman of him whose ear Peter had cut off, pressed him hard, he again denied and cursed himself. Peter goes deeper and deeper. Sin increases awfully. A timid sinner, by sinning on, becomes a bold sinner. The first lie comes shyly and timidly over the lips; but if one keeps on lying, a habit is formed. *Principiis obsta!*—When Peter denied the third time, the cock crew, v. 27. This aroused his conscience to a full sensibility of what he had done. Now he recalled Christ's words: Matt. 26, 34. Christ's eyes met his. The crowing of the cock penetrated his ears. The look of the Lord pierced his eyes. These drove him from the coal-fire. He wept bitterly. His great sin was followed by true repentance.

Conclusion.—Christ suffered stripes for His confession to atone for our denials. May we be warned by the example of Peter! Let us not be found at the coal-fires of the children of the world, that is, their resorts of sinful pleasures. Yield not to temptation! Confess the Lord always!

K. G. M.

IV.

JOHN 18, 28—40.

Brief resumé of preceding sermon.—From the chief council Christ was led to the hall of judgment. They had condemned Him to death and now brought Him to Pilate before the civil court to have Him executed. They did not enter the hall of judgment, that they might not be defiled, but might eat the passover. Behold the hypocrites! They would not transgress their traditions, but they

have no scruples in transgressing God's Law. They come early, that all might be finished at the approach of the Sabbath and the Passover, as well as to prevent a riot.

THE TRIAL OF CHRIST BEFORE PILATE.

1. *The accusation of the Jews.*
2. *The trial of Jesus by Pilate.*

1.

Text: vv. 28—32. Brought to Pilate. Historians describe Pilate as an obstinate, reckless, and inconsiderate character. Philo accuses him of bribery, violence, outrage, robbery, maltreatment, execution without trial, unbounded pride, and the like. V. 29. To please the Jews he came out of the hall of judgment. Pilate wants a distinct accusation. That was Roman principle, Acts 25, 16. From this he did not want to deviate. He well knew that they had falsely accused Him and would have Him killed by a show of right. To his question, v. 29, they answer: v. 30. They accuse Christ as a malefactor, but bring no evidence, and yet expect Pilate to execute judgment. What an unreasonable demand! They knew that Pilate as a civil judge would not honor their religious accusation, and civil accusations they had none. The mere fact that they, the Jews, brought Christ to him should be sufficient proof to condemn Him. Pilate spurns them from his seat with the words: v. 31 a. He would say: If your law allows you to judge and condemn a person without evidence, then take Jesus and judge Him according to your law. But the law of Moses, their law, is more severe than that of the Romans. Cf. Deut. 19, 15. 18. They answered: v. 31 b. The right to put a person to death had been taken from the Jews by the Romans. — V. 32.

Application.—As it was hatred that actuated the Jews to have Jesus killed, so even to-day the world and the wicked are filled with hatred against Christ and His followers. Persecutions during the first three centuries of the Christian era, under popery: the Waldenses, Huss, Savonarola, Luther, etc. The world has not changed. The world falsely accuses the Christians as unpatriotic and disloyal, mocks the Christians, and laughs them to scorn. By suffering the false accusation, Christ atoned for our false accusations and false witness.

2.

Text: vv. 33—40. Pilate went into the judgment hall to preside at the trial of Jesus. Pilate asks: "Art Thou the King of the Jews?" A question of surprise. He saw nothing kingly in Him. He saw no earthly splendor of a king, though the Jews had accused Him of being one. Only awe before the majesty of the accused kept Pilate from mocking and ridiculing this King of the Jews. Jesus was a king, Ps. 2; 72; Is. 53, but not an earthly king. — Jesus

answered: v. 34. He did not ask for information. Cf. Matt. 27, 11. 12. He would warn Pilate to take heed from whom this accusation against Him came, and would tell him that he could know that the accusation was false, that he was not such a king as the Jews claimed. — Pilate rejoined: v. 35. He admits that he has heard nothing of Jesus' usurpation of the title: King of the Jews. The accusation was brought to him by the Jews and their elders. He did not believe the Jews blindly. To find out the facts in the case he asks, "What hast Thou done?" Christ made answer: v. 36. His kingdom is *in* the world, but not *of* the world. If He were an earthly king, He would have had a following to defend Him. His kingdom is not in conflict with the powers that be. Jesus denies that He is a king as the Jews claim, but He does not deny that He is a king, v. 37. His kingdom is a kingdom of truth, founded and maintained by truth. Its only weapon is the Word, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the saving truth. He is the King of Truth. In this kingdom man is taught the truth concerning his eternal state, John 17, 3; 14, 6. To manifest the truth Christ came into the world, and he that loves the truth will hear His voice. — To this Pilate made answer, "What is truth?" He was a skeptic and agnostic. No one can know what is the truth, was his principle. He made this reply in order to end the conversation with Jesus, which had become too serious for this worldling.

Vv. 38 b—40. They prefer to crucify Christ, their Savior, rather than a robber. They choose death instead of life. Behold the blindness of natural man!

Application. — Christ was falsely accused to atone for the false witness we have borne. He voluntarily suffered injustice to set us an example, that we should be willing to suffer for His name's sake. — As Christ confessed the truth of the Gospel, so we should by word and deed confess Christ, and be a living monument of Christ and the truth of His Word, Matt. 5, 16. We will then experience John 8, 31.

K. G. M.

V.

JOHN 19, 1—12.

The band of men and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees led Jesus away from Gethsemane to the ecclesiastical court, to the high priest Caiaphas. There He was condemned as a blasphemer. Then they brought Him to Pontius Pilate to have Him executed. Pilate was not willing to execute Christ upon the strength of the unspecified accusation of the Jews that He was a malefactor, John 18, 30. He knew that He had been falsely accused by His people, and he tried to release Him. He placed the robber Barabbas beside the holy Christ, and induced them to follow their custom of asking for the release of one prisoner at the feast of Passover, believing they would

beg him to release the Christ. But in vain; they asked him to release the robber and to crucify Christ. He then made repeated efforts to release Christ, which, however, all proved useless, as we learn from the present text.

THE REPEATED BUT FUTILE EFFORTS OF PILATE TO RELEASE CHRIST.

1. *The scourging of Christ.*
2. *The presentation of Christ to the people.*
3. *The conversation of Pilate with the people.*
4. *The conversation of Pilate with Jesus.*

1.

Text: vv. 1—3. When the Jews had failed to choose Barabbas in preference to Jesus, ch. 18, 39. 40, Pilate had the soldiers scourge Jesus, v. 1. He was at a loss what to do, Matt. 27, 22. 24. 25. The enemies were determined. In his dilemma he washed his hands to betoken his innocence in the matter, Matt. 27, 24; Deut. 21, 6. 7. His act, however, condemns him, because he gave way to the people. He was the judge. — Because the Jews were determined to have Jesus crucified, Matt. 27, 25, Pilate, etc., Matt. 27, 26. In Roman law scourging was administered to a criminal sentenced to die by crucifixion, in order to multiply pain. Pilate inverts the order. Pilate wished to thus satisfy the people and cause them to desist from their demand. For the same purpose he delivered Jesus to the soldiers to be maltreated, vv. 2. 3. Mockingly they call Him, “King of the Jews.” They had heard Jesus say that He was a king, and knew of the hope entertained by the Jews with regard to the Messiah. They smote Him with their hands, and with the rod which they had tied into His hands, to be held by Him as a scepter. They spit upon Him and worshiped Him, Mark 15, 19. A threefold suffering: a. scourged, b. mocked, c. spit upon. What humiliation! The prophecy Is. 50, 6 literally fulfilled. Cf. Is. 53, 3.

Application. — Because sin has permeated our whole body, Christ must suffer such pain in His body by this maltreatment. Because of our sins He must suffer so, Is. 53, 5.

2.

Text: vv. 4. 5. Christ was scourged and maltreated in the judgment hall. By bringing Christ before the people again, Pilate acknowledged that he considered Him innocent, for after scourging crucifixion should have followed. Pilate was an unjust judge. He confessed: “I find no fault in Him,” after he had virtually condemned Him, by having Him scourged. Pilate was a witness to the innocent suffering and death of Christ, the Innocent for the guilty. — Pilate placed Christ, who wore a purple robe and a crown of thorns, in plain sight of the populace and said, “Ecce homo!” “Behold the

man!" Does He look like a king? You can see that He is not guilty of your accusation. He is humiliated beyond other men, Ps. 22, 6 a. Behold the innocence and patience of the Lamb of God!—Pilate failed to achieve his purpose, which was to rouse the people to pity and to cause them to refrain from their demand. He did not comprehend the enormity of their hatred and fanaticism. What a pitiable sight: the heathen Pilate more merciful than God's chosen people! Natural man hates Christ. These efforts to release Christ were in vain. Therefore:—

3.

Text: vv. 6—8. The effects of Pilate's efforts were entirely contrary to those which he had expected. The sight of Christ fostered the hatred of His accusers and enhanced their murderous inclinations. In a fit of anger they cried out: "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" Pilate's leniency had made them bold. They expected him to crucify Christ, notwithstanding the fact that His innocence had been established, even as he had unjustly scourged the Lord. But Pilate was not yet willing to do this. Indignantly he answered the people: v. 6 b. Pilate was aggravated. They answered: v. 7, referring to Lev. 24, 16. They expected him to discard the Roman law which was in effect, and judge according to Jewish law. Pilate was afraid to condemn an innocent man; he grew more afraid when he heard that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, v. 8.—This effort to release Christ also failed.

4.

Text: vv. 9—11. In order to be undisturbed in this serious proceeding, Pilate went into the judgment hall with Jesus. Pilate's question refers to v. 7. Art Thou really and truly the Son of God, the Messiah, the King of the Jews, or a mere man? Christ made no answer. (Cf. Matt. 27, 12—14; Mark 15, 3—5.) Why? He knew that Pilate would not obey the truth.—It was a punishment for Pilate, because he would not hear the truth. If we despise the Word of Christ when it is proclaimed to us, Christ will not answer when we want to hear Him. (Cf. Prov. 1, 23—28.)—Because Christ did not answer, Pilate thought He despised him, and he no doubt spoke in a stern, reproving tone, v. 10. He wanted to induce Christ to answer. He wished to remind Him of the fact that He was dependent on him for His release. Jesus answered: v. 11. Christ reproves Pilate for his haughtiness, reminding him of the fact that he has his power as a ruler from God and is responsible for his actions.

Application.—Our sins are the cause of all that Christ suffered at the hands of Pilate. May we shun sin! God has the Word of Christ, the truth, the Gospel, preached to us. May we hear it at every opportunity! (Third Commandment.) If we fail to hear and obey Christ when He calls, He will not hear when we call. The five foolish virgins, Matt. 25, 11—13.

K. G. M.